



File Code: 1950/2400

Date: April 25, 2017

To Whom it may Concern:

This project announcement letter serves to initiate scoping, “an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed” (40 CFR 1501.7). I request your input on the following proposed action regarding the Hole in the Ground project.

The Poteau-Cold Springs Ranger District proposes to implement the following management activities*:

Timber harvest, fuels treatments, silviculture treatments, wildlife treatments, and transportation treatments

A detailed description of the Proposed Actions and maps are located on the following website:
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/ouachita/landmanagement/projects>.

Hole in the Ground is located in Logan County, Arkansas, in Township 4 North, Range 27 West, Sections 1-4 and Township 4 North, Range 26 West, Section 6. This project area is approximately 7 miles southeast of Booneville, Arkansas, just south of the small community of Sugar Grove, Arkansas. This area is in the northern portion of the Ouachita National Forest. Most of the private land is in Compartment 204 in the northwest portion of the project area. There are areas of private in the southwest and northeast of *Hole in the Ground*. Local sites include Jack Creek Recreation Area, Knopper’s Ford Recreation Area, Buck Ridge Rifle Range, Hole in the Ground Trail, and Sugar Creek Hiking Trail which all lie south of the project area. Dry Creek Wilderness Area is adjacent to the east. There are county roads and various “dead-end” Forest Service roads leading into and within the project area. Forest Development Roads (FDRs) 19 and 141 lead into the project area on the southwest side. FDR 284 (Garner Road) runs east to west in the northern portion of *Hole in the Ground*. FDR 51 enters the project area on the southeast side.

The proposed action will occur in Management Area 9.

Purpose of the Action

The purpose of this action is to restore the health and vigor of the area by providing for a diversity of plant and animal communities, early seral habitat in a well-distributed grass/forb or shrub/seedling stage, reduction in fuel accumulation, and production of a sustainable yield of wood products.



Need for the Action

- Field examinations and inventories of the Hole in the Ground project determined that the existing conditions do not meet the desired conditions of Management Area 14. The Proposed Actions would move this project towards the desired conditions established by the Interdisciplinary Team and the design criteria in the Revised Forest Plan.
- This project area falls within the habitat area for the endangered American burying beetle (ABB) on the Ouachita National Forest. The proposed activities should move this project area toward the desired habitat for this species by creating an open woodland condition by utilizing methods such as timber harvest, stand improvements and prescribed burning.

Invitation to Participate in Project Planning

Scoping is not limited to a single point in time; we will continue to accept and consider comments until an implementation decision is made. With that said, your comments will be most helpful if they are received early in the process. They will help us identify environmental issues associated with implementation, and alternative ways to meet Forest plan objectives and desired conditions. Your involvement will enable us to better assess concerns of the public.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become a part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Objection Process

This project is subject to subparts A and B of *36 CFR Part 218 Project-Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process* (objection process); it is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA).

The designated opportunity for public comment in response to this solicitation is **April 26** to **May 26**. Providing specific written comments during this time will afford you standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire (see Upcoming Project Planning Steps).

Pursuant to §218.2, specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider.

How to Comment

Specific written comments must be submitted to: AJ Brigance, District Ranger, P.O. Box 417, Booneville, AR 72927 or fax to 479-675-3232. Oral or hand-delivered comments may be made at 2190 Hwy 10 East, Booneville, AR during normal weekday business hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Send electronic comments to comments-southern-ouachita-coldsprings@fs.fed.us.

Upcoming Project Planning Steps

As stated above, your comments will help us identify issues and they will be used to formulate alternatives to this proposal. An environmental analysis will be conducted and the results will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA).

Upon completion, the draft EA will be released for public review and comment. A 30-day notice and comment period pursuant to 36 CFR 218 will be initiated. This comment period will afford you another opportunity to obtain standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire.

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

If you have questions about this project or would like more information, please contact Donna Reagan at 479-675-4743 ext. 107 or dreagan@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/AJ Brigance
AJ BRIGANCE
District Ranger